PARENTS' NIGHT

Sen. Dave McCormick tells Jewish parents he'll work to counter K-12 antisemitism

On a call with concerned Pennsylvania parents, the GOP senator said he'd raise the issue at the federal level and look into the state Education Department's definition of antisemitism

By Marc Rod
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Rep. Dave McCormick (R-PA) speaks at the ICC National Leadership Summit in Washington on July 29, 2025.

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A group of Jewish parents from across Pennsylvania arrived at a virtual meeting with Sen. Dave McCormick (R-PA) with a plea: take note of antisemitism happening not just on college campuses but also in K-12 schools, and do something about it.

The Tuesday evening conversation, organized by the North American Values Institute, brought together four parents who, since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza, have devoted their attention to antisemitism in their kids' public schools.

"They're just looking for help," Steve Rosenberg, NAVI's Philadelphia regional director, told McCormick in the call, attended by *Jewish Insider*. "They need life preservers. They're writing emails, they're sending texts, they're doing everything they can, and they are getting very little, if any, response from their local politicians, from their state level people."

McCormick discussed his bona fides in combating campus antisemitism, pointing out that he was one of the first political figures to call for University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill to resign after her testimony on Capitol Hill in December 2023. But, he told the parents, he was eager to learn about the challenges that their children faced in Pennsylvania's K-12 schools.

"When I heard about this issue, that many parents were feeling various indications of antisemitism in the public schools in and around Philadelphia, it certainly caught my attention," said McCormick. "I wanted to tell you [that] I'd like to be a strong voice in trying to combat this, and I wanted every opportunity to hear from parents about what they're experiencing."

The 45-minute meeting over Zoom did not come after any particular antisemitic incident. The parents all had created local branches of the Jewish Families Association, a network of grassroots hyperlocal advocacy groups that formed after Oct. 7. They wanted to express to McCormick what they saw over the last three years — that antisemitic rhetoric, and language targeting Israel and Zionists, had become commonplace at their local schools. They felt teachers and administrators often were not prepared to handle the issues.

"What's been most concerning to me is not just the incidents themselves, but how increasingly normalized and socially acceptable antisemitic behavior has become, and how often the faculty and admin generally are not equipped to recognize the antisemitism, understand how it manifests today or respond to it effectively," said Caren Lowrey, who works in drug education and prevention and is running as a Republican for a statehouse seat.

Ed Kovler, a parent and activist from Upper Dublin, outside of Philadelphia, asked McCormick for advice on codifying antisemitism policies and educational materials so that school board members and superintendents have resources available, even after leadership transitions. Kovler pointed out that he disagrees with the definition of antisemitism used in the state Department of Education's glossary of equity, inclusion and belonging terms, which says that opposing Zionism is not, "on the face of it, antisemitic," McCormick promised to look into it.

"I obviously am not a state official, but as a federal official, I'll make an inquiry to the Department of Education and the governor and say this definition seems inconsistent with what we all would accept is antisemitism, and can you make the necessary judgment," said McCormick. "That'll be a takeaway from this call."

Mark Isakowitz, McCormick's chief of staff, urged the parents to document every instance of antisemitism that they see.

"There are things we can do as policymakers, but please double down on cataloging the examples," Isakowitz said. "I know there's been a ton about Philadelphia, and I've seen it all, but we need more of that, because there are people who are still gaslighting the whole issue."

McCormick told the parents that he would not stay silent.

"I think part of the problem we're seeing is people who aren't antisemitic in public life are tolerating antisemitism," said McCormick. "It's not that they're antisemitic themselves. It's just that they haven't shown the courage and the moral clarity to fight it."

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